6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
Sanema

island of unbroken forest, which is not crossed by any formidable water barrier. If this were the case, the Shirians, who are pre-eminently a land people, would be presented with an insurmountable obstacle.

North of the Brazilian frontier live the Shirians of the Canaracuni and the Merevari. These are divided into various clans, the most important being the Uana-Dildep, the Haruao, the Oskadeli, the Kopali, the Hana-Dildep, the Ukumatari, the Kona-Kona—they swarm like ants. Then there are the Guayca Shirians of Uarema, lately established on the Merevari, but originally from the Upper Uagna. Along the mountain watershed which extends, with frequent interruptions, from the Uagna to the centre of the highlands where the Uraricoera, the Ventuari and the Padamo rivers rise, one encounters the nomadic Samatari—the 'people of the pineapple'—a fierce and savage race of howling creatures that run in packs like animals.

The general term used by the Shirians to designate their most savage tribes is 'Guayca' (in their language, 'wild'). By the Guayca they sometimes mean the Samatari and sometimes the Ukumatari. On the Padamo and in the lowlands enclosed by the great mountains of Marahuaca and Duida—that is, to the south of the central ridge—they have spread right beyond the upper reaches of the Orinoco: though in these regions there are also many of the more peaceful Shirian peoples such as the Uaka on the Uesete, the Faricete, the Matacuni, the Kologli, the Haue, and the Ish'tich—the 'people of flowers and bananas'. The Guayca and the Samatari are also to be found east of the Padamo-Orinoco–Rio Parima watershed, in the wildest and least-known territory. Isolated groups, with a touch of the legendary about them, inhabit the fringe of this region: for instance, the Kasarape, credited by all Shirians with unparalleled ferocity and cruelty. The Kasarape inhabit the right bank of the Lower Uraricoera in Brazil, and no traveller appears to have visited them yet.

How numerous are the Shirians? No one can state a figure with any certainty, but it may be accepted that they run into many thousands, and taken together represent a block that outnumbers all other races and tribes inhabiting the Orinoco and Rio Branco basin.

I had asked Luis Antonio whether it would be possible for me to be present during the confinement of his kinswoman, presuming the happy event took place during our stay, but all I got for an answer was a doubtful 'I don't know' —the formula in which the Indian takes refuge when he does not know what to say. This did not quite deny the possibility, even if it did not encourage the

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
Sanema

to use our machetes to open up a fair-sized space so that we could drag the canoes up on to dry ground beyond the reach of possible floods. Behind the bamboos we could see traces in the undergrowth of an old track, which after crossing thirty-two hills and the length of the Aracosa river would lead us to a horde of howling ape-men, who cultivated cane for their arrows, and nothing else.

Uarema had a young dove which he had caught alive on the way along the Merevari, and was looking after it. He gave it the affectionate name of Pipa. Sempronio helped him by looking for little berries, which the pretty little bird took greedily. The others were meanwhile busy putting up a shelter for the night and clearing a little more space around it, while Hashimo and Solituan went off to make a brief reconnaissance of the all but vanished track. Uarema paid no attention to anything but his Pipa, calling its name softly and fondling it like a child.

A love for animals always seems strange among these Indians, and when it exists it is subject to the wildest caprice. For instance, a monkey, after being brought up among them with every sign of affection, will suddenly become a comic target for their blunt arrows and die a slow death from its wounds.

For the moment Uarema was lavishing all his affection on Pipa, and when I accidentally trod on the bird, squashing it flat as a pancake, he turned on me instinctively, as if he was going to throw himself on me: the Guayca Indian in him had suddenly come out, roused by this offence against his love for the poor little dove crushed under the foreigner's foot. But suddenly his mood changed and without a word he picked up the squashed bird, under whose wings there was still a flutter of life, and threw it far off, with an air of disgust.

Sempronio watched the incident, laughing very quietly as he always did and looking up at me: he seemed to regard me as some sort of personal protector of his own. Then he went off in search of Pipa. Rolled up in a few leaves, the bird was put aside for his private cuisine.

Sempronio came from Auai stock. He was a mere boy, not fully developed, and he had joined us in this Samatari venture simply because I had told him to come. 'He doesn't want to come, but you want him to, so he comes'—these were the exact words into which Uarema had translated Sempronio's brief remarks. And he came everywhere with us, even to the Samatari, who were considered by his own people—a good, *smiling* people, whose only remaining primitive trait lay in their inordinate passion for theft—to be monsters ready at

6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
Sanema
Makiritare SS20

Y 123*

been fought over it to destroy the entire race. But all the Uana-Dildep and the Kologli could do about it now was to howl out loud in their complete helplessness, and cling to the walls of the hut like monkeys.

M 122 123

We should certainly have liked to give them something, but apart from the fact that the length of our trip and all the unforeseen things that might happen made it advisable for us to be as careful as possible with the goods we needed for wages, we couldn't take more porters than were necessary: the expedition would be top-heavy. Besides this, to introduce Shirians into the crew would have put the others in a bad humour. They were the superior race, and could not allow the others to compete with them in their work.

M [186]

We packed our baggage with care, painting the tins with a special red varnish to keep them waterproof. There was some of the varnish left over, so we painted our straw hats too, and they emerged from the treatment with a proud and martial aspect which made a strong impression on the Indians. With the final scrapings of the paint tin the Shirians painted themselves and then went off in triumph to their homes, with enough tales to last them a whole year—all about aeroplanes, machete-thefts, varnish, and those accursed Makiritari who'd taken all the red cloth and left the Sanema, as ever, in dire want.

Y [186]

N 123

Carmine set out first in a light dug-out canoe, and I followed him next day in Pedro's big craft. A little below the landing-beach we met with a canoe coming up river, labouring against the stream. It was loaded with Guayca: Luis Antonio, with his brothers and cousins. They had only just heard of our arrival and were coming to find us. It would have been embarrassing to have to refuse their services, but Uarema himself broached the subject first and saved us from any awkwardness by telling us that he would have been most willing to come, but had work on hand, burning off and clearing a *conuco*, that would keep him busy for a month. He would come along on the next trip. He wanted to know who else was taking part in the Shirian Expedition, and he kept on our tail all day, saying that he would like to be of any help he could. But I knew very well he was after some little gift—our stores were new, and made his mouth water. In fact that evening, when we had joined up with the advance party (they were in camp on the headwaters of the Turucuma, a right-bank tributary of the Canaracuni which runs very close to the Upper Merevari)—that evening, Luis Antonio got up to his old tricks and asked for presents outright. I had to get rid of him, so, next day, without anybody else knowing, I

Y 123*